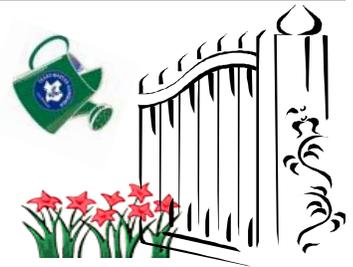




Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume III, Issue 12

Official E-letter of the Ellis County Master Gardeners Association, Waxahachie, Texas

January, 2010

Welcome to the Ellis County Master Gardener's **E-Gardening** newsletter. The purpose of this newsletter is to give you a month by month agenda of what you should be doing to your landscape. We will be featuring horticulture articles that we hope you will find interesting, important dates where you can find the Master Gardeners speaking, demonstrating and passing out information relative to your garden. If you would like to receive this newsletter monthly via your email address, log onto our website www.ECMGA.com, click on subscribe, and it will be sent around the 1st of every month. Best of all; it's FREE!

Melinda Kocian, editor



Last Call - Master Gardener Training

Texas Master Gardeners are trained members of the local community who take an active interest in their lawns, trees, shrubs, flowers and gardens.

They are enthusiastic, willing to learn and to help others and are able to communicate with diverse groups of people. The Master Gardener training program equips participants with horticultural knowledge in plant selection, proper planting methods, disease and weed management, ornamental trees and shrubs, plant identification methods, fertilization, water conservation, soil and plant nutrition, pruning methods and much more.

This is a great opportunity for community gardening enthusiasts to gain an increased knowledge in horticulture, improve their gardening skills, and develop a better understanding of the gardening issues Ellis County faces. The program's goal is to develop a pool of well-trained Master Gardeners prepared to serve the residents of Ellis County.

The time commitment is every Tuesday and Thursday from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. during the month of February. Additionally, trainees will be asked to complete 75 hours of volunteer service before graduating from the Master Gardener program.

The Master Gardener program offers members numerous methods for obtaining their volunteer hours while serving Ellis County. One such method is through the Junior Master Gardener program.

Application forms are available on the Ellis County Master Gardener's website: www.ecmga.com or by calling 972.825.5175. Tuition for the program is \$130. Class size is limited and attendance is required at all sessions to complete the program. Deadline for application is January 8, 2010, but classes fill quickly and applications are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.



Listen to KBEC.....

Saturday mornings at 9:00 a.m. on 1390 AM.

The Ellis County Master Gardeners have a 5-minute segment every week, offering you helpful information on what you need to be doing in your landscape, as well as "happenings" around the county. Be sure to listen in!

Melinda Kocian



Mark Your Calendars!

The 2010 Ellis County Master Gardener's EXPO is set for Saturday, March 27th at the Waxahachie Civic Center.

Anyone wishing to become a sponsor or an exhibitor of the 2010 Expo, can find additional information on our website: www.ECMGA.com or contact James Kocian: 972-814-0699, or expo.ecmga@yahoo.com.

Keynote Speaker: Neil Sperry!

Inside this issue:

<i>It's January</i>	2
<i>Vegetable Garden Monthly</i>	3
<i>What's Happening</i>	4
<i>Attention Birders</i>	4
<i>Evergreens</i>	5
<i>Wildflower of the Month</i>	5
<i>Xeriscape</i>	6
<i>Inside Gardening</i>	7
<i>What Else?</i>	7

It's January - What Needs to be Done



Possumhaw Holly (*Ilex deciduas*)

Photo by Linda Moxley

Plant native trees to conserve water, attract wildlife, and beautify your landscape. Possumhaw holly is a native shrub/tree that grows up to 15 feet high. When female possumhaws lose their leaves, bright red or orange berries ornament the barren limbs. The berries are eaten by birds and other wildlife including opossum; hence the common name, possumhaw. (The berries are poisonous to humans.)

Planting and Sowing

- Winter is the time to transplant mature trees and shrubs. It is best if they are root-pruned in the fall.
- Seeds for warm-season annuals can be planted in flats. They will require bright light and warm temperatures (60-70 degrees). Peppers and tomatoes can be planted from seed mid-month. Use grow lights for best success.
- Sow snap peas and plant onions directly into your garden.
- Tulip and hyacinth bulbs which have been chilled for 8 weeks should be planted immediately after removing from the refrigerator.

Fertilizing and Pruning

- Apply a liquid root-stimulator monthly to newly planted trees and shrubs.
- Now is the best time to prune oak trees and other shade trees to remove lower limbs, dead branches and to maintain their natural shape.
- Peach and plums trees should be pruned to keep their "bowl" shape and remove water sprouts.

Garden Watch

- Remove by hand, broadleaf weeds such as clover, dandelions, henbit, chickweed in lawns and beds. You can also spot spray large areas with a broadleaf weed killer when temperatures are above 70 degrees. Read and follow the label carefully on any pesticide before using.

This and That

- Select and order bulbs for planting later in the year.
- This is a good time to have your soil tested in your vegetable garden, flower garden and lawn. Contact an Ellis County Master Gardener or your County AgriLife Office for the necessary collection and mailing supplies, or for more information.
- Plan what you will plant or do in your garden this year such as vegetable, flowers, container combinations, or any landscape improvements.
- Repair and/or tune up your lawn mower and any other power equipment.

Tips for January

Healthy soils are essential in urban landscapes. Organic matter additions can transform poor soils into a fertile growth medium that supports healthy plant growth while reducing water and fertilization requirements.



Vegetable Gardeners Monthly

By Rick Daniel

Ellis County Master Gardener/Vegetable Gardening Specialist

Hello, and welcome to the January edition of the Vegetable Gardeners Monthly. If you have questions that this article doesn't address, just give us a call at 972.825.5175 or contact us via the web at www.ecmga.com and ask for one of your Master Gardener Vegetable Gardening Specialist.

It's time to plant fruit trees, as well as grapes and blackberries. Plant well adapted varieties and plant at least two each of apples and pears for maximum production. Till the garden to expose wintering insects and turn under clover and other green manure crops. Add fresh manure to the garden to allow time for decomposition before spring planting. If you haven't done so already, have your garden soil tested. Plan what and where you will plant for your spring garden.

You can sow snap peas and plant onions into your garden.

Here are a couple more trees. I will start back on vegetables again next month.

Featured Vegetable of the Month

By Rick Daniel

Ellis County Master Gardener



Trees of the Month



FRUIT AND NUT TREES:

PECAN:

Varieties: Best are native and other small nut trees. Caddo, Cape Fear, Cheyenne, Choctaw, Desirable, Kiowa, Shawnee, Kanza or Osage.

Culture: Easy to grow in most soils. Will grow better in deep soil, but can even grow in limestone rock.

Fertilizer: Fertilize three times a year at 20 pounds per 1000 square feet in early February, June and September. Once healthy soil is achieved and trees are established, you can cut back to one application per year.

Harvest: In fall when the nuts start to fall from the trees. May need to shake or thrash tree to get all nuts to fall. Can be stored in a cool dry place or shelled or unshelled in the freezer.

Planting: Bare-rooted or from containers. Can be planted from seed also, which will have better taste and higher quality oil. Choose a well drained site with plenty of room as pecans get big. Staking, wrapping the trunk and cutting the top back to match root loss are common but bad recommendations and can be detrimental to tree establishment and growth.



PEACH:

Varieties: Bicentennial, Denman, Dixiland, Frank, Harvester, Jefferson, Loring, Milam, Range, Redglobe, Redskin, Sentinel and Springold.

Culture: One of the most difficult to grow fruit trees in Texas. Requires lots of tender loving care. Super healthy soil is imperative. Mulch on the soil is critical. Prune the trees to maintain a "bowl" shape. Some recommend pruning as early as January, but I prefer to prune just before the last freeze date in mid April. If you prune too early, it might stimulate the tree to bloom early and you will lose your fruit if we have a late freeze.

Fertilizer: An organic program works very well with peach trees and foliar feeding is a must!

Harvest: Harvest the fruit in summer when slightly soft to the touch and ripe. Eat as soon as possible or store in a cool dry place.

Troubles: Most of the disease problems can be minimized with a basic organic program. Insect pest can be controlled with citrus based products.

What's Happening in January?

Monday, January 18 - 7:00pm. - Garden Inspirations - Starting Your Seeds. This class will introduce you to starting seeds indoors for your spring gardens. We will discuss seed selection, heirloom and open pollination, days to harvest, scarification and much more. This will be a great class! Marilyn Simmons, 108 Ridge Crest. Waxahachie, Texas, 214.497.3918.

Cedar Ridge Preserve - 7171 Mountain Creek Parkway, Dallas, Texas. www.audubondallas.org/cedarridge.html for location map.

Saturday, January 16 - Conservation in Action - Third Saturday of every month from 9-11am; rain or shine. Volunteers remove non-native plants, restore trails, and work in the butterfly garden. Repairing trails reduces erosion trouble spots and removing non-native plants clears crowded trail edges. We'll provide snacks, water, pruning shears, shovels and work gloves. All you need to bring is sun screen and bug repellent. Questions? Contact info_CRP@yahoo.com.

Saturday, January 16, 8am - Winter Bird Walk - Leader Jim Varnum, Master Naturalist and long-time volunteer leads a 2-hour walk through forest and field to look for winter birds. Expect to see sparrow, kinglets, chickadees, wrens, maybe a hawk or two, etc. Bring your binoculars, wear sturdy boots and shoes with good ankle support.

Saturday, January 16, 11am - Nature Walk - Jim Varnum will lead a 2-hour walk through forest and field to look for wintry things. Here's an opportunity to get out of the house for a couple of hours to observe winter birds, winter color (berries and leaves) and maybe even some butterflies. Bring your binoculars and camera.

Please RSVP is you are bringing a group. jevnum@aol.com or 214.543.2055.

Sunday, February 27 @ 10am and 1pm - Geoffrey B. Stanford Trout Lily Walk, Trout lilies, or white dog-toothed violets, are the harbinger of spring in the plant world. These flowers in the lily family bloom from just mid-February to mid-March. Jim Varnum will conduct a short 1-hour walk to observe trout lilies. Bring your camera. RSVP is not required, but would be appreciated. jevnum@aol.com or 214.543.2055.



Attention Birders in Ellis County

By Jean Wammack
Ellis County Master Gardener,
Ellis County Birdwatcher



It's time to clean out and repair nesting boxes.

We have been promoting nest boxes for the songbirds. Now is the time of year to check your boxes. Clean them out; rub a dry bar of Ivory Soap inside the box to discourage wasp from building a nest. If a wasp should build inside the box the birds will depart even leaving eggs in the nest. If a squirrel or woodpecker has enlarged the entrance hole, place a new front on the box lining up the 1 1/2" hole right over the old hole. We are trying to be better stewards by placing a predator guard under the nesting box on the steel pole. You may purchase them or make the guards from stovepipe or PVC. The guards will prevent snakes, raccoons, and squirrels from reaching the eggs or baby birds.

Can you be successful attracting song birds? If you live on acreage, you maybe able to attract song birds: wrens, titmouse, chickadees, and bluebirds by adding nesting boxes. My special interest is the eastern bluebird; a shy member of the thrush family. Nesting pairs will readily accept man-made boxes. Buy or make a box that opens from the side or front so it is easily monitored and cleaned. Boxes should be placed in an open field on a steel post about 5 feet above the ground and facing a tree within 50 feet. The tree will provide a perch for the young birds as they begin to fly. Boxes should be placed well away from buildings and deep shade. It is helpful if water is in the area. If possible, add a bird bath. The bluebird's diet is insects, especially **grasshoppers!** They add berries to their diet in the winter. Pokeberry, grapes, French mulberry, hackberry, Texas persimmon, sumac, pyracantha and viburnum sup-ple food for the bluebird.

Nest boxes can be made from scrape lumber. For a pattern come by the AgriLife office at 701 S I-35E, Waxahachie, TX or call 972.825.5175.

Evergreens

By Jackie Wilhite,
Ellis County Master Gardener



Evergreens are the focus of a lot of attention during the holidays. No other time of the year do these plants receive so much attention. They are used as Christmas trees, gifts, wreaths, centerpieces and floral arrangements. The aroma of the evergreen fills the air. Most of the greenery at the holidays comes from spruce, fir, holly or cedar.

The official Christmas tree chosen to stand at the White House this year is a blue spruce which is known for the blue cast of its needles.

While beautiful for the holidays, the evergreen is a great plant all year round. It is attractive in its native habitat, makes an ideal anchor plant for a new flower bed or gives color to the landscape. Cedar, junipers and pine trees provide a backdrop of green that enhances the display of fall foliage in deep East Texas. The evergreen colors the landscape while other plants and trees are dormant for the winter.

Early settlers brought what they could to shade their farmhouses as they settled across the plains of the Texas panhandle. The evergreen provided protection from dust storms as well as the much-needed shade. Central Texas is also home to a number of cedar and juniper varieties that are underused by landscaping needs.

The word evergreen is defined as retaining green leaves all year long. This is the opposite from deciduous, which refers to the plant shedding its leaves when it prepares to go to sleep for the winter. The new leaves seem to push the old leaves off in species such as the live oak. In other words, it does shed its leaves but does it in such a manner that it will have some new leaves and some mature leaves on the tree at the same time.

Other species never lose their leaves. We usually think of trees when we refer to evergreens but trees are only a small part of the evergreen family. There are a great number of plants used in the landscape that are classified as evergreen. Most of these trees and shrubs are resistant to cotton root rot while the remainder are considered to be resistant. These plants also don't usually suffer from bug or pest invasions. They can be some of the hardiest plants and will be drought tolerant once established.

Some of the most popular medium, small or dwarf shrubs are Rosemary, lavender, yucca, palms, agave and oleander. Some of the larger shrubs will include Nellie R. Stevens holly, Savannah holly and yaupon holly, ligustrum, Chinese photinia, southern wax myrtle, cherry laurel, Texas sage and boxwood.

Some of the semi-evergreen plants include cross vine, Lady Banks rose, Carolina jasmine and clematis (deciduous to semi-evergreen).

When planning a new landscape or incorporating new plants into an established site. Remember, the evergreen will be present with its beautiful color all year long. You don't have to wait until spring for it to return to its majestic beauty.

Featured Texas Wild Flower of the Month

Submitted by Melinda Kocian
Ellis County Master Gardener



Anemone decapetala (Nutt.)
Buttercup Family (Ranunculaceae)

Size: 6-20 inches
Blooms: January-April, Perennial

Blooming earlier than nearly any other flower, anemones bring the promise of spring. Ranging in colors from white, pink, violet and blue to purple, the wheel-shaped flowers are one and one-half inches across, and appear at the tips of unbranched stems. Ten to thirty petal-like sepals encircle a cylinder, which elongates to one and one-half inches as the flower matures. Between a basal rosette of leaves and the flower, a whorl of much smaller leaves surrounds the stalk. Three species of anemones are found in Texas. They grow mostly in grassy areas, their flowers opening in the sun and closing at night. The word "anemometer", for wind gauge, is derived from the same Greek work as anemone, or windflower.

Xeriscape - Landscape Water Conservation

By Gail Haynes, Ellis County Master Gardener



Xeriscape landscaping incorporates several basic principles that can help preserve our most precious natural resource - water.

- **Good design:** Start with a sketch of existing structures, trees, shrubs and grass areas. A landscape architect, county extension office or a Master Gardener can assist with your plans.
- **Soil analysis and preparation:** The extension office has soil test kits available to test the soil. To increase plant health, add organic matter to the soil of shrub and flower bed areas. This increases the soil's ability to absorb and store water in a form available to the plant.
- **Appropriate plant selection:** Using native plants and trees reduces water use. Most have fewer pest problems and less fertilizer needs.
- **Efficient irrigation:** All trees and shrubs need more frequent watering from plant time until becoming well established, which may take two growing seasons. Once established, plants tolerate less frequent irrigations.
- **Use of mulches:** Mulch conserves water by reducing moisture evaporation from the soil. Mulch reduces weed populations, prevents soil compaction and keeps soil temperatures more moderate.
- **Appropriate maintenance:** Timely maintenance such as appropriate mowing and fertilizing will conserve water.
- **Three different plant zones can be incorporated into a water efficient landscape:** Regular watering zone, occasional watering zone and natural rainfall zone.
- **Regular Watering Zone:** Plants in this zone would require watering once established, in the absence of rain.
- **Occasional Watering Zone:** These plants would require watering once every two or three weeks, once established, in the absence of rain.
- **Natural Rainfall Zone:** Plants in this zone would require only natural rainfall, once established.

By zoning the plants in the landscape according to their water requirements, you prevent the situation of having to overwater one plant type to meet the needs of another.

Every region of Texas has a palette of plants to choose from which are adapted to the soil, temperature extremes and pest problems of the area. The challenge for both the professional and amateur gardener is to categorize the plants based on expected water requirements. By using the categories of natural rainfall, occasional watering, and regular watering, most gardeners can find the best place in the garden for the plants in their region.

For example, in much of Texas (areas of 30-plus inches of rainfall), the following categorization is often used.

- **Regular watering zone:** Turf grasses and annual flowers
- **Occasional watering zone:** Perennial flowers and tender woody shrubs and vines
- **Natural rainfall zone:** Tough woody shrubs and vines and all trees

All plants do have a place in a Xeriscape or EarthKind landscape.

Visit your nursery or garden center and start creating your own beautiful, water-conserving landscape.

What To Do

- Don't get in a hurry to prune woody plants. Late December through February is usually the best time to prune them.
- Prepare beds and individual holes for rose planting in January and February. Use composted manure, pine bark and similar materials mixed with existing soil.
- Use good pruning practices when selecting Christmas greenery from landscape plants. Don't destroy the natural form and beauty of the plant.
- Protect your lawn from excessive winter damage by providing irrigation during dry periods.
- Plant spring flowering bulbs if you haven't already done so. Be sure to refrigerate tulips and hyacinths for 6-8 weeks prior to planting.
- Prolong the life of holiday-season gift plants by providing proper care. Check to see if the pot wrap has plugged up the bottom draining. Don't overwater. Keep out of drafts from heating vents and opening doorways. Fertilizer is seldom needed the first few months.
- Want to start cuttings of your favorite Christmas cactus? As soon as it has finished blooming, select a cutting with four or five joints, break or cut it off and insert the basal end into a pot of moderately moist soil. Place it on a windowsill or other brightly lit area. Place it on a windowsill or other brightly lit area. The cuttings should be rooted within 3-4 weeks.
- Take advantage of bad weather and holiday time to study seed and nursery catalogues as well as good gardening books.
- Place orders for seeds this month so you will have them available when you are ready to plant. By ordering early, you will be more certain of getting the varieties you want. In addition to ordering seeds that you are already familiar with, try a few new kinds each year to broaden your garden contents.

Inside Gardening

By Nancy Fenton
Ellis County Master Gardener



With the cold weather it is a good time to review all those plants you have brought into your nice, warm houses such as ivies, poinsettias or Christmas cacti. All will add oxygen to your recycled inside air and can go outside again in March.. I also bring in my Chinese Evergreens to provide some color and oxygen for the colder months, but I have to wait to put them back outside until the leaves on my pecan trees come out so they will have shade and avoid burning their tender leaves.

If you received azaleas for Christmas, enjoy them in the house and then throw them away unless you are willing to change out the soil in a flowerbed for them. They love very acid soils and just “turn up their toes” at our alkaline soils.

When plants are brought inside the house, they need a bit more attention when the heat is on because they have a tendency to dry out quickly. A good technique to determine if they need water is the weight test. If they are light when lifted, water them. If they are heavy, wait a day or two. After soaking my plants in the kitchen sink, I let them drain in the second sink before sticking them back in their container or foil to avoid water in the bottom that might cause root rot. A good soak for 15 to 30 minutes when dry (usually once a week) will help keep them in fine form throughout the winter months.



It's January - What Needs to be Done?

By Rosemary Morgeson, Ellis County Master Gardener



Now is a great time to move trees and shrubs in your landscape! It's also a great time for removing any erratic growth on your evergreen trees and shrubs. Remove dead or damaged branches and lower limbs that are no longer wanted. Also remove any mistletoe from your trees. Prune your peach and plum trees now. Prune so that you can maintain a good horizontal habit and strong scaffold branching.

Fertilize your winter annuals with a water-soluble plant food and feed your tropical indoor plants with a high-nitrogen water soluble food monthly.

Take advantage of any opportunity to prepare your beds now so that you aren't delayed at planting time. Roto-till garden plots every 6 weeks over the winter to incorporate autumn's fall leaves, rotted compost and other organic matter. Keep turning your compost piles. Once a week turning helps to make compost quicker. Apply lawn-type fertilizer to compost, one cup per cubic yard, mix the fertilizer into the organic matter and water regularly.

Plant winter berrying plants like various hollies, pyracanthias and nandinas. Plant your flower and vegetable seeds, to grow transplants for your spring garden. You still have time to move established trees or shrubs that must be relocated. Dig with balls of soil intact around their roots, and thin or reshape top growth to compensate for lost roots.

January is the start of spring gardening season. You can get the beds ready by mixing in compost and then covering the soil with mulch, leaves or spent hay. This will protect the soil surface and deter weeds from germinating. Plant grape vines and blackberry plants this month. Water new transplants with a diluted fertilizer solution; this will help get the new plants off to a good and fast start. Prune your evergreen shrubs to direct growth at this time, also your summer flowering shrubs and vines to remove damaged or dead branches.

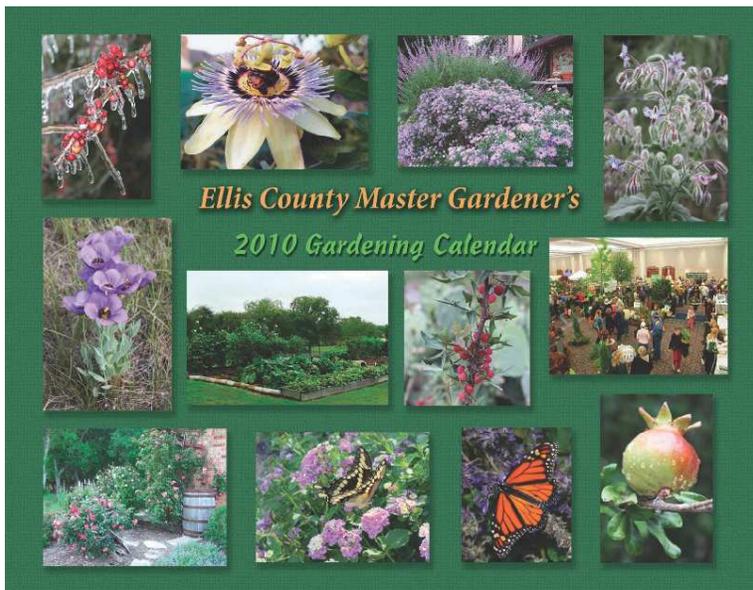
Beat the spring rush and get those dull garden tools sharpened and your lawn equipment serviced now!

Watering still plays an important part to your gardening during the winter months. Check the soils around your shrubs and trees for moisture and don't forget about your grasses! Water as needed to keep the roots from drying out. Remember that water acts as an insulator to your landscape during the winter months.

Prune your Rose-of-Sharon and other summer-flowering shrubs and vines at this time. Trim lightly or the plants will produce excessive vegetative growth.

Be sure to keep your Christmas cacti, cyclamen and azaleas away from hot drafts. Keep them moist at all times to prolong their flowering times indoors. Wondering what to do with those Christmas blooming amaryllis? Take it outdoors about February and plant it in a well drained rich organic soil mixture; it will bloom again next spring. Be sure that it receives at least 6 hours of full sun.

The 2010 Gardening Calendar is Here!



The much awaited 4th annual Ellis County Master Gardener gardening calendar is here and it's...**FREE...while the supply lasts!** from the following sponsors.

AgriLife Extension Office
ARK Country Store
BBQ Pit-Waxahachie
Bella Misty
Boyce Feed & Grain
CNB of Texas
College Street Pub
Compton's Carpet Cleaning
City of Waxahachie
EarthTones Greenery-Midlothian
Ellis County Art Assoc.
Ellis County Master Gardeners
Garden Inspirations
Gingerbread Press
Lawn Masters

Midlothian Conference Center
Midlothian Feed
Natural Water Works
Pam Daniel, Ebby Halliday Realtors
Rainwater Harvesting Solutions
River Mist Pools & Spa, Midlothian
Rock Pile
Stone River Landscaping
Tex-Scapes Greenery, Ennis
The Dove's Nest
The Greenery, Waxahachie
The Rogers at 100 NoCo
Vintage Bank
Travis Equipment
Waxahachie Daily Light

Please support these sponsors!
This calendar would not be possible without them!



Thank You to our 2009 Expo Sponsors!



Gold Sponsors



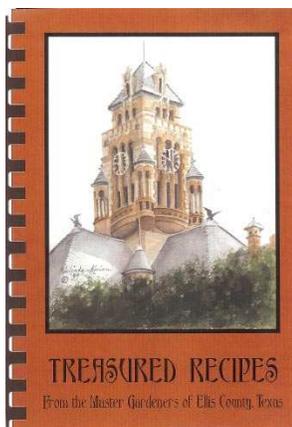
Bronze Sponsors

Tex-Scapes Greenery
Waxahachie Civic Center

Green Sponsors

Gardenscapes By Diane
CNB of Texas
Roland's Nursery & Landscape
Structured Foundation Repairs Inc.
Neighborhood Credit Union
PatioScapes, LLC
Ennis Garden Club
Holcim (Texas) LP

**Please support
These Expo
Sponsors!**



Available Now!

Ellis County Master Gardener's Cookbook

Only \$10.00

(beautifully hardbound - 450 recipes)

Now that the Waxahachie Downtown Farmer's Market is over until May 2010, the cookbooks can now be purchased at:

**The Greenery, Waxahachie
ARK Country Store
Boyce Feed & Grain
EarthTones Greenery, Midlothian
AgriLIFE Extension Office, 972.825.5175
S IH-35 @ Brookside Rd.**